

CLAIMS

Having thus described our invention, what we claim as new and desire to secure by Letters Patent is as follows:

5 Claim 1. A method of playing a game using a symbol matrix formed by a plurality of rows intersecting with a plurality of columns, with the plurality of rows and columns defining a plurality of symbol positions, comprising:

- 10 a) optionally placing a wager to play the game;
- b) randomly generating symbols for each symbol position in the symbol matrix;
- c) displaying the symbols generated for each symbol position in the symbol matrix;
- 15 d) issuing awards for winning symbol combinations displayed in the symbol matrix;
- e) setting the status of each symbol position as either "locked" or "unlocked";
- f) if any symbol positions are unlocked, repeating
- 20 the following steps until all symbol positions are locked:
 - 1) randomly generating symbols for each unlocked symbol position;
 - 2) displaying the symbols generated for each

unlocked symbol position; and

- 3) issuing awards for winning symbol combinations displayed in the symbol matrix.

5 Claim 2. A method of claim 1, wherein the awards issue based upon at least one of the following winning symbol combinations:

- a) pre-determined combinations of symbols appearing contiguously in a pre-determined group of symbol positions in the symbol matrix;
- 10 b) pre-determined combinations of symbols appearing anywhere in a pre-determined group of symbol positions in the symbol matrix; and
- c) pre-determined combinations of symbols appearing
- 15 in any symbol positions in the symbol matrix.

Claim 3. A method of claim 1, wherein the awards issue based upon at least one of the following winning symbol combinations:

- 20 a) pre-determined combinations of symbols appearing contiguously on a pay line;
- b) pre-determined combinations of symbols appearing anywhere on a pay line; and
- c) pre-determined combinations of symbols appearing

anywhere in the symbol matrix.

Claim 4. A method of claim 1, wherein the type of awards may change during the game.

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Claim 5. A method of claim 1, wherein the type of awards may change during the game, with the initial spin and/or subsequent re-spins issuing at least one of the following award types:

10 a) credits valid for at least one of any purpose, limited purposes, specific purpose, and redemption according to any conversion rate;

 b) free games that may be played at no cost to the player;

15 c) currency in at least one of any paper or coin form, denomination, and nationality;

 d) prizes of at least one of any value, shape, size, description, and distributed according to any delivery schedule; and

20 e) services of any value, duration, description, and/or provided according to any performance schedule.

Claim 6. A method of claim 1, wherein the amount of awards may change during the game.

Claim 7. A method of claim 1, wherein the amount of awards may change during the game, with the initial spin and/or subsequent re-spins changing award values using any of the following methods:

a) increasing or decreasing some or all awards listed in the pay schedule by a fixed amount;

b) increasing or decreasing some or all awards listed in the pay schedule by a random amount;

c) increasing or decreasing some or all awards listed in the pay schedule by a multiplicative factor; and/or

d) increasing or decreasing some or all awards listed in the pay schedule in response to player input;

e) adding or subtracting winning symbol combinations and associated awards from the pay schedule.

Claim 8. A method of claim 1(e), wherein the symbol positions are "locked" by the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in the symbol matrix.

Claim 9. A method of claim 1(e) in which symbol positions are "locked" by at least one of the following methods:

a) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols "locks" those symbol positions in which

the pre-determined symbols appeared;

b) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a column "locks" all of the symbol positions in that column;

5 c) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a row "locks" all of the symbol positions in that row;

d) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in the symbol matrix "locks" all of the symbol positions in the symbol matrix;

10 e) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a symbol position "locks" all of the symbol positions adjacent to that symbol position;

15 f) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a column "locks" all of the symbol positions above or below the pre-determined symbol(s);

g) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a row "locks" all of the symbol positions to the right or left of the pre-determined symbol(s);

20 h) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a pay line "locks" all of the symbol

positions on that pay line; and

- i) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a pay line "locks" all of the symbol positions before or after the pre-determined symbol(s).

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Claim 10. A method of claim 1(e) in which the status of each symbol position, as either "locked" or "unlocked", by the appearance of one or more winning combinations in the symbol matrix.

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Claim 11. A method of claim 1(e) in which symbol positions are "locked" by at least one of the following methods:

- a) a winning combination "locks" all of the symbol positions involved in that winning combination; and
- b) the appearance of a winning combination "locks" all of the symbol positions not involved that winning combination.

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Claim 12. A method of claim 1(e) in which "locked" symbol positions are "unlocked" by the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in the symbol matrix.

Claim 13. A method of claim 1(e) in which "locked" symbol positions are "unlocked" by at least one of the following methods:

- 5 a) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a column "unlocks" all of the symbol positions in that column;
- b) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a row "unlocks" all of the symbol positions in that row;
- 10 c) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in the symbol matrix "unlocks" all of the symbol positions in the symbol matrix;
- d) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a symbol position "unlocks" all of the
15 symbol positions adjacent to that symbol position;
- e) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a column "unlocks" all of the symbol positions above or below the pre-determined
20 symbol(s);
- f) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a row "unlocks" all of the symbol positions to the right or left of the pre-determined symbol(s);

- g) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a pay line "unlocks" all of the symbol positions on that pay line; and
- h) the appearance of one or more pre-determined symbols in a pay line "unlocks" all of the symbol positions before or after the pre-determined symbol(s).

Claim 14. A method of claim 1, wherein the steps 1(f)(1) through 1(f)(3) are repeated a predetermined number of times until all symbol positions are "locked."

Claim 15. A method of claim 1, wherein the steps 1(f)(1) through 1(f)(3) are repeated a predetermined number of times, and optionally conclude prior to all symbol positions are "locked."

Claim 16. A method of claim 1, wherein the steps 1(f)(1) through 1(f)(3) are repeated a predetermined number of times, and optionally conclude prior to all symbol positions being "locked," according to at least one of the following methods:

- a) A fixed number of re-spins of at least one symbol position, including at least one of:

- i. a fixed number of re-spins of all symbol positions;
 - ii. a fixed number of re-spins of particular symbol positions;
 - 5 iii. a fixed number of re-spins of pre-determined groups of symbol positions;
 - iv. a fixed number of re-spins of symbol positions in a column;
 - v. a fixed number of re-spins of symbol positions in a row;
 - 10 vi. a fixed number of re-spins of symbol positions in a pay line; and
 - vii. a fixed number of re-spins of particular symbols in the symbol set.
- 15 b) A variable number of re-spins of any or all symbol positions, including at least one of:
- i. a variable number of re-spins of all symbol positions;
 - ii. a variable number of re-spins of particular symbol positions;
 - 20 iii. a variable number of re-spins of pre-determined groups of symbol positions;
 - iv. a variable number of re-spins of symbol positions in a column;

v. a variable number of re-spins of symbol positions in a row;

vi. a variable number of re-spins of symbol positions in a pay line; and

5 vii. a variable number of re-spins of particular symbols in the symbol set.

c) At least one of fixed and variable number of re-spins, and at least one symbol position are determined by at least one of:

10 i. wager amount;

ii. award amount;

iii. winning symbol combination;

iv. pre-determined symbol combination;

v. player input; and

15 vi. at random.

Claim 17. A method of claim 1, wherein the steps 1(f)(1) through 1(f)(3) are repeated a predetermined number of times and optionally conclude prior to all symbol positions
20 are "locked," with an award issued at the completion of the final re-spin.

Claim 18. A method of claim 1, wherein the steps 1(f)(1) through 1(f)(3) are repeated a predetermined number of

times and optionally conclude prior to all symbol positions being "locked," with an award issued at the completion of the final re-spin and based upon at least one of the following methods:

- 5 a) wager amount;
- b) number of re-spins;
- c) locations of symbol positions involved in any or
 all of the re-spins;
- d) number of symbol positions involved in any or all
10 of the re-spins;
- e) winning symbol combinations appearing during any
 or all of the re-spins;
- f) pre-determined symbol combinations appearing
 during any or all of the re-spins;
- 15 g) player input at least one of before, during and
 after any or all of the re-spins; and
- h) a random amount selected from within a range of
 pre-determined values.

20 Claim 19. A method of playing a game using a symbol matrix formed by a plurality of rows intersecting with a plurality of columns, with the plurality of rows and columns defining a plurality of symbol positions, comprising at least one of the sequential, non-sequential

and sequence independent steps of:

a) randomly generating symbols for each symbol position in the symbol matrix;

5 b) displaying the symbols generated for each symbol position in the symbol matrix;

c) issuing awards for predetermined winning symbol combinations displayed in the symbol matrix;

10 d) setting the status of each symbol position as either "locked" or "unlocked" responsive to predetermined criteria;

e) when at least one symbol position is unlocked, repeating, until all symbol positions are locked, the following at least one of sequential, non-sequential and sequence independent steps of:

15 1) randomly generating symbols for each unlocked symbol position;

2) displaying the symbols generated for each unlocked symbol position which replaces a previously displayed symbol; and

20 3) issuing at least one award for winning symbol combinations displayed in the symbol matrix.

Claim 20. A game machine for playing a game and having a symbol matrix formed by a plurality of rows intersecting with a plurality of columns, with the plurality of rows and columns defining a plurality of symbol positions,
5 comprising:

Means for randomly generating symbols for each symbol position in the symbol matrix;

Means for displaying the symbols generated for each symbol position in the symbol matrix;

10 Means for issuing awards for predetermined winning symbol combinations displayed in the symbol matrix;

Means for setting the status of each symbol position as either "locked" or "unlocked" responsive
15 to predetermined criteria, and when at least one symbol position is unlocked, means for repeating, until all symbol positions are locked, the functions of:

20 1) randomly generating symbols for each unlocked symbol position;

2) displaying the symbols generated for each unlocked symbol position which replaces a previously displayed symbol; and

3) issuing at least one award for winning

symbol combinations displayed in the symbol
matrix.